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LIBERATED PAINTINGS

by

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in the

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of the

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Advisor: Fred Meyer

To John

WOMAN AS WOMAN

As a professional critic of life and letters, my principal business in the world is that of manufacturing platitudes of tomorrow, which is to say, ideas so novel that they will be instantly rejected as insane and outrageous by all right-thinking men, and so apposite and sound that they will eventually conquer that instinctive opposition, and force themselves into the traditional wisdom of the race.¹

In this era of enlightenment, in this new age of humanity, the question of liberating women from traditional roles seems, to many, to be a bit passe. The current movement of female liberation has surfaced, reached a certain peak, and is presently looking around and wondering where to go next. Where, indeed, when the first spasms of male laughter and female terror have subsided into a supercilious atmosphere of liberalism and apparent well-being. After all, doesn't the fact that many businesses use "Ms." (an offensive-sounding superficiality that still discriminates between sexes) in their correspondence indicate the embodiment of feminist philosophy? Now that the little woman has been encouraged to, by all means, go out and get a job (never mind that with the exception of a few new token positions filled by women, the employment and salary pictures remain virtually unchanged), the male social conscience has been eased. I have yet to meet a man who does not claim support for the women's movement (in the same manner that one must be pro-black). Show me a male liberal, however, and I'll show you, in many cases, a wife or a

¹H.L. Mencken, In Defense of Women, p. vii.

girlfriend who is still bearing more than she should bear, and still enduring beyond belief. Just why is the American woman the way she is today, and, more importantly, how has her role as a woman affected her role as an artist? How does she see herself, and how does society see her? And finally, what is she doing about herself and the institutions that surround her?

We know very little about the daily lives of women before the eighteenth century, besides the fact that they married young to pre-arranged husbands, and spent their lives bearing and raising children. Women have traditionally maintained an existence as second-class citizens, indeed, such a life was predetermined by the very nature of our paternalistic society. Engles traces the subordination of women to the rise of private property, and obviously a woman was one of the most desirable pieces of property a man could possess. Ownership was perpetuated on all economic levels. For a poor man, quite possibly a wife was his singular possession, while a wealthy man, by marrying well, increased his status and riches in much the same manner as with the purchase of a rare vase or a fine thoroughbred. Biological distinctions created a division of labor based on the reproductive process, making man the bourgeois and woman the proletariat. The patriarchal institutions of marriage and the family have remained substantially unaltered; continually perpetuating women's dependence upon men for physical shelter as well as for an emotional identity. Frequently, however, monogamous marriages have not proved happy. Marx, in fact, once observed that the family unit contained, on a small scale, all of the antagonisms and injustices that are established within society as a whole. Strange as it may seem,

many wives experienced frustration under the protective yoke of dependence. It has proven difficult (but not yet as difficult as it should be) for many women to remember their places--to submerge themselves completely into the lives of husbands and children. It is a strain to spend one's life forming an identity based on another individual; and while stretching toward the ultimate goal of assimilation, it is difficult to reconcile the pangs of emptiness and the cheated feelings. Women are now realizing that it is not possible to become a whole being vicariously, while in the role of a servant, but that is what the American wife and mother has attempted to do. It is impossible to be dependent and to be equal. Thus, it is easy to trace the rise (and subsequent decline) of feminism in America, and to analyze its implications for the current movement.

The early militance of such famous suffragettes as Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton was basically ineffectual and short-lived. In essence, they attempted to rectify the social injustices endured by women, by treating the symptoms and not the root causes of sexual repression. This is not to say that we would be at our present point had they not existed, or even that the movement of the sixties and seventies will not eventually backslide in a similar manner. However, the fact remains that after the twenties, women retreated to their safe niche as homemakers, and let the vital ebb and flow of culture move unacknowledged about them.

The early feminists were a product of the industrial revolution. Until the end of the nineteenth century, feminist revolution existed only on a personal level. Patterned after the American Revolution, and instigated by the Civil War and

abolitionist causes, the first feminist movement was basically radical. It met with disproportionate violence for the period, since the threat it posed to a heretofore totally male culture was indeed serious. The effect of the radical feminists was not long enduring, however. The only sphere of agreement among women who united under the feminist banner, was the desirability of the vote. By 1890, the issue of women's rights had been compromised to a broad, unified effort for suffrage, and when that was obtained, little else could re-unify the feminist factions. As Shulamith Firestone states: "With the granting of the vote the establishment co-opted the women's movement."² Even an endeavor to boycott male political parties and to establish a feminist power base in politics failed. The master planners of the feminist revolution were too old or dead: even this limited goal had exhausted three generations of effort. Women, by now, were out of the house and firmly entrenched in the service-oriented occupations they still inhabit. They were smug and complacent under the misconception that they had "won" over men by procuring the vote. The sad reality was that paternalistic society succumbed just enough of itself to rob the movement of its bite. New opportunities, to a limited extent, were available to women in the Progressive Era, but these, too, were mixed blessings. The liberalized attitudes toward education and careers became complicated by the fact that at the same time that middle-class women became conscious of the limitations of the familial role, they lost the tradition of domestic servants, or the unpaid help of relatives (grandmothers and maiden aunts who, as a

²Shulamith Firestone, The Dialectic of Sex, p. 23.

matter of course, made their homes with younger, larger families). Therefore, the new consciousness was either lost completely to the necessities of home and family, or was compromised by the obligatory fulfillment of two roles. It is clear, then, that early efforts to get the vote and to remove discriminatory laws, were not enough to deeply alter feminine roles. The tyranny of the patriarchal family and the lack of re-definition of basic social structures prevented the new legal gains from making any profound differences in our culture. It is for this reason that feminism has re-surfaced after the dormancy of the forties and fifties, in what Kate Millett calls a "counter-revolution." To quote Millett: "The real causes of the counter-revolution appear to lie in the fact that the sexual revolution had, perhaps necessarily, even inevitably, concentrated on the superstructure of patriarchal policy, changing its legal forms, its more flagrant abuses, altering its formal educational patterns but leaving the socialization processes of temperament and role differentiation intact."³ Women were not yet enlightened enough about themselves or their stifling environment to realize that social and economic equality can never be created by the mere removal or alteration of laws, but only by the personal fulfillment of individuals through some manner of challenging and satisfying function (with options over and above that of housewife).

It is a peculiar fact, however, that women in the late thirties, the forties and especially the fifties, were not involved in any form of socially productive work, but were instead almost universally dedicated to the art of procreation. The philosophic

³Kate Millett, Sexual Politics, pp. 176-177.

stance of social responsibility and careerism of the twenties gradually, insidiously, began to be replaced by the ethic of "higher domesticity," as women were gradually eased back into the home for the specific purpose of removing them from the post-war labor market. Women were encouraged to voluntarily leave their jobs through the promise of upward mobility, respectability and security within their function. In the forties and the fifties, women once again began marrying younger, and having more children, sooner, than their sisters of the twenties. Post-war and depression conservatism, sparked by anti-Communist and anti-social innovation sentiments, put women back in the home and created an atmosphere where few women of distinction could, or did, surface. Nurtured by the Freudian flurry that was sweeping the nation, it was in the fifties that it became virtually un-American not to be a happy housewife; and it was in that same period that the intellectual stagnation of women reached its infamous prominence. The entire social and cultural structure of women was geared to that of the housewife. Women were educated, not for the edification of their own intelligence, or for the general elevation of culture, but to become decorative, informed help-mates for the "legitimate" social-movers of the day, who were always male. The incredible aspect of this development is the fact that women were so willing, even eager, to assume such a supplementary role. It was, and is, far easier to commandeer a morally and intellectually lazy berth than it is to fight the pervasive social institutions that place women in such a second-class situation.

Betty Friedan and her theories concerning the

sexual mystique of women blossomed forth at the height of the civil rights movement, and at a period when the Vietnam War raised other questions about existing American institutions. With the development of inflammatory black outrage, women began looking at one another with a new sense of awareness and empathetic realization. Indeed, it was the younger women activists who toiled in southern voter registration campaigns, who marched and who "sat-in" with all the commitment they could muster, who first registered disbelief and then fury at Stokely Carmichael's oft-repeated (and undoubtedly oft-regretted) phrase: "The only place for women in SNCC is prone." Their reverberating rage took shape within a protest movement that already had a formal structure and a national operative base. The late sixties, then, developed into a massive consciousness-raising for American women. The technological assistance of mass media provided publicity (most of it with the typical patronizing inflection that was the masculine mode) and women aligned themselves into feminist groups of varying degrees of radicalism. An endeavor was made by these organizations not only to reassume the legislative battles of the early suffragettes, but to alter the entire self-conception of women today.

The time was ripe for such a movement. Since 1960, the marriage age has again moved up, and with in incaluable influence of the Pill and various abortion reforms, the birth rate has decreased. In the past decade women have discovered freedom from their previous biological destiny. The result has been a widespread abandonment of traditional child-rearing schedules; replaced now with completely childless (by choice) career women, or women who have found the means of determining the size and timing

of their families, thus enabling them to assume vocations outside the home when they choose. The stigma of divorce has also been drastically eased, providing an increasingly popular alternative to repression in an unhappy marital situation. These combined factors have produced an additional quantity of women in the work force (by 1968 there were 29 million women working, 40% of the labor population), yet the median pay was \$4,457, only 58.2% of that of men's. A mere 3% of those fully employed women have passed the \$10,000 salary limit, while 28% of the men earn more than that figure.⁴ When the organized machinery of the feminist structure began pumping out these economic statistics--statistics that affected women in every walk of life, and in virtually every economic strata, the fury of working women was aroused. These humiliating salary figures represented much more than mere money; they represented every job unobtained, every promotion denied, every slight, or jibe, or injustice received and sustained, because the worker was female. They symbolized the hours of unnoticed, unrewarded effort, because to reach any position, at any level, a woman must do more than would be required of a man, to demonstrate her worth in "his" world.

With these economic realizations came ensuing revelations of discrimination in every conceivable field. In education, in business, in literature, religion, art and science, women began demanding a voice after literally centuries of silence. Women have become increasingly aware that they have so

⁴Alice S. Rossi, "Sex Equality; The Beginnings of an Ideology," in Voices of the New Feminism, ed. by Mary Lou Thompson, p. 66.

little representation in government, especially on the federal level. Even though Israel and India have manifested trust in women as national leaders, the "progressive" United States has never done so. Ten years ago there were two women in the Senate and eighteen representatives in the House. Today we have only Margaret Chase Smith in the Senate and eleven representatives. There has never been a woman Supreme Court justice, despite recent attempts to install one. In essence, although women have won legislative rights, they still have a lengthy road to travel to gain equality in pay, position and political power, the things that make America click.

Such a situation is not accidental. Part of the dilemma exists within women themselves. Sexual conditioning is a grave reality and there is no woman alive, radical feminists included, who does not feel the pull of traditional role behavior, at one time or another. The conditioning to second-class citizenship is so basic that many women experience great insecurity from the fear that the myth of feminine inferiority is true. In addition, women have found it difficult to start or to maintain feminine relationships. From puberty on, girls have been trained to seek and catch a male mate, a vocation that allows scant room for female (i.e. enemy) relationships. Then, with the inevitable marriage, a woman furthur isolates herself from friends and relatives, often being required to pick up and leave when the husband's job makes demands. So she exists in a cloistered vacuum of husband, children, and perhaps a few business friends of the husband, none of whom can provide her with meaningful feminine companionship, let alone empathy, growth, or stimulation. For a man, however, society supplies many bases for solidarity.

Besides the cohesion of fellow workers, and the primarily male organizations that are vocation-oriented (Jaycees, union groups, fraternal associations, etc.), men are consolidated in their recreational activities, through politics and athletics; all major class equalizers and unifiers (if you are male) in this country. Women's leisure activities have tended to be either auxillary or more isolated in nature (sewing, gardening) and have accomplished little to bring women together on a meaningful level. The last several years have propagated alterations in this structuring, however, both within the youth of the nation, who have been favoring male/female peer groups as a social base (instead of the customary quarantine of "going steady" with just one person), and with adult women who are discovering common ground and support from other women in consciousness-raising groups. The changes are far from complete; but they are assisting in the intense struggle to desegregate many traditionally male sanctuaries (both physical and psychological).

These efforts at cohesion are minor, compared with the obstacle of the male species. Men have a definite vested interest in maintaining the status quo. After all, who wouldn't want a wife to take care of all the mundane distractions of living? I myself would like one, too! And if she decides to work in addition to keeping the house and caring for the children, why, so much the better. The surplus income relieves some of the financial stress of male role demands!

Men preserve the system by perpetrating the myth of male superiority. This is a behavioral certitude that is so thoroughly entrenched in the foundation of our society, that it is difficult to distinguish between reality and cultural propaganda.

John Stuart Mill was the first man since Plato to perceive that we could never discover the basic innate differences in sexes because we have never produced a society with only one sex.⁵ We have existed within a culture that fosters separate values for men and women. Those of men (sports for example), are considered superior to those of women (home, fashions), therefore it is always male values that determine cultural direction--furthermore discouraging feminine endeavors. Virginia Woolf complains bitterly that women tend to "alter their values to the deference of others."⁶ In so doing, women perpetrate the distinctions between the sexes, and acquiesce to the secondary role. This submission is more readily explained if it is remembered that women have no past as a distinct group. Cultural history is predominantly male; there are few feminine examples of achievement for a thinking woman to identify with, not even any historical unification, as have the proletariat. Women who have broken the mold of cultural conditioning have done so virtually alone.

The position as a subordinate people has a unique feature, however, for no other minority group has had to endure the dicotomy of affection and love for the oppressor. This willing and affectionate submission creates yet another internal barrier to feminine freedom, and one that cannot be resolved by its mere removal.

One of the most damaging limitations imposed upon females exists in the form of contemporary

⁵Florence Howe, "Sexual Stereotypes Start Early," Saturday Review, October 16, 1971, p. 77.

⁶Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own, p. 129.

psychology. Enthusiastically embracing Freudian philosophy, and eager for an explanatory panacea, women convinced themselves that, in truth, the unhappiness they experienced was a direct result of their sex, and not of the environment that shapes it.

Freud's basic premise, that anatomy is destiny, and that women are biologically inferior to men, provided the necessary propellant to plunge women back into the realms of insecurity. Consequently, they retreated into the only province they recognized as exclusively theirs--the home. Freud asserts that women are psychologically scarred from the moment they learn, as little children, that they lack the penises of their brothers. This moment of discovery is catastrophic for a small girl, and it fashions the principle basis of her future self-image. Freud neatly ignores the social environment of childhood, choosing instead to define women in negative terms: she "lacks." Freud's three aspects of feminine psychology: passivity, masochism, and narcissism, are all rooted in the theory of "penis envy." He draws the conclusion that women cannot feasibly contribute to civilization because they represent passivity (socially, and because they are sexually and biologically "receptive"). Activity, on the other hand, is a masculine characteristic, and it is the male libido which shapes our culture. (Women are described as having a weak libido--another unfortunate consequence of being born without a penis). Masochism Freud relates as being a passive attitude, as it enables women to preserve their passivity within society. Men, in their virile activity would, of course, not possess this feminine trait. Narcissism, the third characteristic Freud attributes to women, is also produced by penis

envy: "The effect of penis envy has a share, further, in the physical vanity of women, since they are bound to value their charms more highly as a late compensation for their original sexual inferiority."⁷ It is no wonder that the "feminine mystique" woman turned to such a superficial lifestyle in the face of such a condemnation. Women were culturally and sexually inferior, but if they could justify themselves as having an important decorative function, they could train themselves to become social embellishments. But Freud is not content with this shallow definition of women's potentials. In his theory of biological destiny, Freud reduces women's only contribution to civilization to that of child-bearing. (He feels that women view cultural civilization as their rival because of their intrinsic inferiority). Even bearing children, however, is cited as a substitute means of obtaining a penis. (Women, themselves, prefer to have male babies). Exclaims Kate Millett:

Freudian logic has succeeded in converting childbirth, an impressive female accomplishment, and the only function its rational permits her, into nothing more than a hunt for a male organ. It somehow becomes the male prerogative even to give birth, as babies are but surrogate penises. The female is bested at the only function
Freudian theory recommends for her, reproduction.⁸

Freud insists that only man can contribute to civilization through the sublimation ("instinctual

⁷ Millett, Sexual Politics, p. 197. Also, Sigmund Freud, "Femininity," from New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis, trans. by James Strachey, (New York; Norton, 1964), p. 119.

⁸ Millett, Sexual Politics, p. 185.

renunciation") of his sex-drive and the subsequent development of a super-ego. This formation occurs through castration fear; obviously since woman never had a penis to worry about, her super-ego development is much weaker. If, by some quirk of biological fate, a woman attempts to transcend her role as child-bearer (penis-seeker), she is described by Freud as a castrator of men for the sake of revenge. This, in turn, will probably lead to neurosis. To quote Freud:

The wish to get the longed-for penis eventually, in spite of everything, may contribute to the motives that drive a mature woman to analysis... a capacity, for instance, to carry on an intellectual profession--may often be recognized as a sublimated modification of this repressed wish.⁹

Thus Freud translates woman as being vain, stupid, and subservient. She is passive, has a low libido, and an undeveloped super-ego. Whether she spends her life competing with men on an intellectual level (castrating bitch!) or having his children (no cultural capabilities!), her every act is the direct response to her lack of a penis. Laughable and incredible as this philosophy may seem today, its effects were very real in thrusting the tenuously emancipated woman back into the safety of the home. We are still reeling from the aftermath of Freud, whose misogynist attitudes have been slightly disguised to form the basis of many contemporary philosophies. Erik Erikson, for example, in his recent book, Identity, Youth and Crisis, devotes an entire chapter to the delineation of woman's identity as totally biological.

⁹Ibid., p. 188. Also, Freud, "Femininity," p. 125.

Erikson differs from Freud, however, in that he glorifies women's uterine functions and denies any feminine sense of inadequacy. Women's sole pre-occupation is with their "inner space" while men are concerned with the "outer space" which is the cultural environment. By similarly limiting women's character to that of biology, Erikson, like Freud, denies women access to achievement on a higher plane. He maintains that women's whole sense of self and her creative drives revolve entirely around the processes of pregnancy and childbirth. To quote Erikson: "No doubt the very existence of the inner space exposes women early to a specific sense of loneliness, to a fear of being left empty or deprived of treasure, of remaining unfulfilled and of drying up."¹⁰ Nowhere in his philosophy is there the suggestion that women might reach fulfillment through experiences other than maternal. The closest Erikson comes to encouraging female participation in the world at large is his recommendation that women make their "feminine characteristics" accessible to men, to temper the reality (i.e. war) of the masculine world. Erikson remarks:

Maybe if women could only gain the determination to represent publicly what they have always stood for privately, in evolution and in history (realism of upbringing, resourcefulness in peace-keeping and devotion to healing) they might well add an ethically restraining, because truly supernatural, power to politics in the widest sense.

¹⁰ Erik Erikson, Identity, Youth and Crisis, p. 262.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 277.

A strong proponent of peace and other so-called "feminine" characteristics, he refuses to believe that they could be distributed to both sexes. He prefers to pigeonhole each sex with its appropriate traits; those of women being (by the nature of her inner void) of course, lesser.

In the face of such a knowledgeable interpretation, it is no wonder that women have not sought the means to define themselves. When they are told, time and again, that women's contribution to civilization is children, and that the loneliness and frustration experienced are but manifestations of a maternal void (rather than an intellectual void), why should women struggle for an identity of their own making? When noted psychologist Bruno Bettelheim declares that even though women may desire to be great scientists or engineers, their primary concern is being good wives and mothers,¹² what alternative philosophies can a woman cite in her own defense? With American psychology consisting of variations on a Freudian theme, women don't stand a chance.

Therefore it is conditioning that is woman's greatest barrier to liberation--the conditioning built within our culture that tells a woman in a thousand different ways all through her life that she is a woman, and must adapt herself to a pre-determined womanly role. Girls are not born with instantaneous inferiority complexes. As documented by Eleanor Maccoby in The Development of Sex Differences, pre-school girls score higher on I.Q. tests than do boys of the same age.¹³ It is not until

¹²Naomi Weisstein, "Kinder, Kuche, Kirch as Scientific Laws: Psychology Constructs the Female," in The New Women, ed. by Joanne Cooke, et al., p. 155.

¹³Eleanor E. Maccoby, The Development of Sex Differences, p. 36.

high school that the conditioning really sinks in and girls realize that they are supposed to be stupid. The cliches about sex-typing (girls stay at home and numb their brains like Mommy while boys go out and work in the world like Daddy) are all too real. Girls learn not to be aggressive, not to show too much intelligence; to sit on the sidelines and get vicarious pleasure from the real participants, the boys. The sex-typing stereotypes begin, of course, in the home, but even alert parents find it difficult to counter-balance the role-casting that schools and other social institutions inflict upon a child.

The key to the continuous development of creativity and intelligence in girls ostensibly rests in freedom from repression, especially as far as sex roles are concerned. To quote Maccoby: "For girls by contrast (with boys) the crucial factor in the development of I.Q. appears to be relative freedom from maternal restrictions...Analytic thinking, creativity, and high general intelligence are associated with cross-sex typing."¹⁴ Another proponent of this theory, Calvin W. Taylor, states:

Both boys and girls suffer in their creative development from our society's over-emphasis on sex roles. Both simply shut out certain areas of awareness and refuse to think about them. Creativity, by its very nature, requires both sensitivity and independence of thinking. In our culture, sensitivity is definately a feminine virtue, and independence is a masculine one.¹⁵

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 35,37.

¹⁵Calvin W. Taylor, Creativity: Progress and Potential, p. 100.

And finally H.L. Mencken, in his In Defense of Women:

Man without a saving touch of woman in him, is too doltish, too naive, and romantic, too easily deluded and lulled to sleep by his imagination, to be anything above a cavalryman, a theologian or a bank director. And woman, without some trace of that divine innocence which is masculine, is too harshly the realist for those vast projections of the fancy which lie at the heart of what we call genius.¹⁶

While I am not at all sure that I agree with his categorization of male and female, the point is clear. Those males who are most creative have a great many "feminine" sensibilities, while those women who are most imaginative and intelligent are more masculine and aggressive than their mediocre all-female counterparts. It is unfortunate for both sexes, however, that cross-sex typing is not always recognized for its creative potential. Many a parent has traumatized an overly effeminate boy or a masculine girl, to the point where social anxieties outweigh all the freedom that combined sexual characteristics could produce. This reasoning is prevalent in a society that places great value on the masculine male and the feminine female images. It is further reinforced by such damaging "authorities" as John Nash who states:

Because there is evidence to suggest that maximum developmental efficiency is achieved when the male or the female develops along sex-appropriate lines, the encouragement of the identification process with the same-sex parent is desirable to realizing the aim of

¹⁶H.L. Mencken, In Defense of Women, pp. 8-9.

producing the fullest potential of the individual.

Here it is important to note that the stress is on efficiency and not creativity, a typical "worth-while" goal for our technological society to accent. The breadth of experience that an androgenous mind can produce, however, provides the most fertile ground for the seed of creativity.

An additional complexity in the consideration of social conditioning is that of thought processes. Logical thinking has generally been considered a masculine attribute while intuition is classified as feminine. The typical female defense is thrown up by Germaine Greer, who says:

It is true that women often refuse to argue logically...In most situations logic is simply rationalization of an infralogical aim. Women know this; even the best educated of them know that arguments with their menfolk are disguised realpolitik. It is not a contest of mental agility with the right as the victor's spoils, but a contest of wills.

While this, in some instances, may be true, there is also reason to believe that some women do think differently than men. Perhaps the traditionally more passive woman forms opinions on the basis of observations and reactions while the more aggressive male suppresses this receptivity in the self-interest of domination. At any rate, there is currently a vast movement, especially within the youth culture,

¹⁷ John Nash, Developmental Psychology: A Psychobiological Approach, p. 490.

¹⁸ Germaine Greer, The Female Eunuch, p. 102.

to reintegrate thought and feeling. Progressive educational institutions are recognizing the value of creative thinking over the mental disciplines required in the past, and are adjusting curricular requirements to suit these demands. Daniel Yankelovitch stresses the same longing for fresh emphasis on intuition and emotional response by stating that today's youth are attempting "to devalue detachment, objectivity, and non-involvement as methods for finding truth; to arrive at truth, instead, by direct experience, participation and involvement."¹⁹ It is a positive sign that the youth of today are searching for other means of understanding besides analytical thought. This could lead to what Cynthia Ozick labels "The Ovarian Theory of Mind,"²⁰ where the emotional, intuitive characteristics ascribed to women could be promoted from their inferior status and incorporated into the thought patterns of all people. Since logic and abstract thinking are not synonymous with truth and knowledge, the integration of the two systems would serve to free men emotionally and women psychologically from externalized repression. The restricted mentality that has proven to be a divisive element between the sexes would be transformed to make men emotionally healthy; it could produce new humanistic standards of creative excellence to replace the traditional masculine criterion of success. It would do our society indeterminate harm to resolve the sex issue by forcing women to

¹⁹ Daniel Yankelovitch, "The New Naturalism," Saturday Review, April 1, 1972, p. 35.

²⁰ Cynthia Ozick, "The Demise of the Dancing Dog," in The New Women, ed. by Joanne Cooke, et al., p. 26.

adopt a masculine role. We must, instead, strive for learning patterns that include both masculine and feminine qualities of thought. The inhibitions that both male and female may experience in regard to their sexual stereotypes may then be lessened to resolve the creative conflicts from which many individuals of both sexes suffer.

The most influential conditioning factor outside the immediate family, is the educational system, an institution that mirrors sociological attitudes better than most. During the period between 1945 and 1960, it was a peculiar fact that while more women than ever before were going on to college, there was a smaller proportion of doctorate degrees issued than in the twenties, and fewer women were distinguishing themselves in their studies. In 1956, the Mellon Foundation study of Vassar girls indicated that not many students had any real commitment other than acquiring a husband and being a housewife. Of the one third who were interested in graduate school or immediate careers, most would sabotage these plans if there was any conflict with husband or family. The study revealed few girls who were willing to make personal sacrifices for a commitment to society, and few who anticipated or even desired fame or status through their personal efforts. The majority of women wanted primarily to find a man who was aggressive and who would provide the dominate, decision-making element in the family. Overall hung a deadly blanket of conformity. Individual girls who were especially committed to their art, or who were exceptional students in some way were considered abnormal and undesirable.²¹

²¹Betty Friedan, The Feminine Mystique, pp. 143-146.

How did this phenomena occur? The post-war period was subject to the good intentions of social scientists who, with the help of Freud and his biological destiny of women, attempted to account for the unhappiness of the American woman. They reached the conclusion that the previous philosophy of educating women had done them irreparable harm by first encouraging them to think, then returning these "de-feminized" women to the home where they could not reconcile the change in expectations. Thus emerged the concept of "educational functionalism" whereby a woman is educated to be a housewife and a helpmate--nothing more. It stressed adjustment as the primary function of women and promoted such curricular challenges as English literature, journalism, fine and applied arts, and home economics rather than medicine, law and the pure sciences. Special educational programs were hastily established for women's "special needs" which were low-status, short-term classes in occupational training (such as dietetics), that would both impede intellectual stimulation and limit women's vocational future to that of semi-skilled labor. This theory of education has sifted down to the high school level where girls are urged to take easier courses than boys, including such challenging subjects as "Marriage and the Family." This method of conditioning at such a critical age encourages a girl to fulfill her biological demands before her intellectual needs. Stagnation of mental capabilities and an emphasis on vicarious living are the obvious consequences. To quote Betty Friedan:

The main barrier to such growth (intellectual) in girls is their own rigid preconception of women's role, which sex-directed educators reinforce, either explicitly or by not facing

their own ability, and responsibility, to break through it.²²

By conditioning women to develop a purely sexual identity, educators are reinforcing the self-representative role that many women assume long after they have left the protective environment of home or school. This mode of conditioning is made more complete by the elimination of any effective role models for female students to follow. Even women's colleges maintain predominantly male faculties and administrations--a ready demonstration of the future limitations for women. The belief still persists that male faculties are more prestigious than those with female members, and feminine students are often the perpetrators of such a fallacy by expressing preference for male teachers over female. Only recently have colleges assumed responsibility for breaking the cycle of sex-stereotypes with the introduction of women's studies into the curriculums and the recruitment of female faculty members (to a limited extent). Hampshire College in Massachusetts has made a significant effort to eliminate stereotypes in its faculty and student body by making a conscious effort to hire teachers who are interested in, and capable of dealing with, the issue of sexuality. They are attempting to maintain a faculty of at least one third women, with an emphasis on varied life styles to provide a broad cross section of role models.

Other institutions of higher education are in the process of establishing special programs to accomodate adult women who have been removed from academic life for some time, and who have more

²²Ibid., p. 155.

complex needs, as far as scheduling and day-care facilities. The stigma of the negligent working mother can only be completely buried by the incorporation of such centers as an intrinsic element in every college campus. This will then make it possible for women to obtain the intellectual stimulation so long absent from their daily lives, without the accessory burden of parental guilt. More extensive arrangements for women with families will have to be established in every social institution to facilitate growth and development in mothers. As Doris Pullen says:

If women ask for and receive an expensive education, women have an obligation to make a return to society on its investment. If, however, society wants this kind of woman also to have a family, society has to make it possible for her to keep professional proficiency in her field while she is bearing children.²³

Our institutions must demonstrate their social responsibility by providing the flexibility vital for the development and maintenance of feminine potential. To do less is to deny women the equality of opportunity that men receive.

²³Doris L. Pullen, "The Educational Establishment: Wasted Women," in Voices of the New Feminism, ed. by Mary Lou Thompson, p. 133.

WOMAN AS ARTIST

The cultural conditioning of women plays an essential part in the analysis of women as artists. The legend of creatively inferior women, as evidenced by the lack of noteworthy female artists, has come under serious criticism of late. Society had taken refuge in two diametrically opposed cases concerning women and art. On the one hand is the argument that women have never created anything of value and on the other is the argument that culture has not prevented them from doing so, or at least not definitively since figures such as Georgia O'Keeffe and Louise Nevelson have emerged as exceptions which prove the rule.

The narrowness of this latter argument negates the reality of the majority of women artists. The very fact that these women are exceptions (and there are so few of them) supports the fact that women artists lack an historical tradition. Most of the women who have "made it" experienced a profound sensation of walking alone, of breaking new cultural ground, and of establishing new artistic precedents. But in the same manner that the Jewish race has been culturally inhibited from producing great visual artists, by continual social repression, both external and internal, women, too, have been restricted by their conceptions of themselves as determined by society. There is some reason for hope. As the "enlightened" twentieth century gave to the Jews such non-traditionalists as Chagall and Modigliani, so too have women been experiencing new artistic

freedoms. But the battle is far from won. To quote Simone de Beauvoir, "The very circumstances that turn women to creative work (i.e. protest against the world--resorting to the imaginary) are also obstacles she will very often be incapable of surmounting."²⁴ It becomes far easier and far less complex for a woman to live vicariously through a creative husband as exemplified by the number of wives of prominent artists who, once freed by death or separation, become creative entities in their own right. If, indeed, she does her own work, it is still fantastically difficult for a woman to be more than a rank amateur in her creative efforts; labeled both by society and herself as a "lady artist." Instead of devoting their entire being to the creation of art, many women still consider the creative act to be a mere adornment of their lives. They are far from ready to make the sacrifices necessary to pursue their craft, especially when such self-denials represent conflicts between the roles of woman as artist and woman as mother/wife. Art is viewed as a means to an end (either the immediate relief from boredom or dissatisfaction, or the fantasy goal of instantaneous fame), rather than as an end in its own right. The amateur woman-as-artist has been carefully taught that she cannot really succeed, in fact, she is basically frightened of the thought of success, therefore her efforts in any direction will be superficial. By maintaining a Sunday-Painter level of competence, she avoids the crisis of self-examination which would almost certainly lead to a demand for changes within herself and throughout the environment that surrounds

²⁴ Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex, trans. by H.M. Parshley, p. 663.

her. The limitation of artistic goals serves the potentially creative woman by enabling her to utilize art for a momentary sense of pride or escape without rocking the status quo. This continual pattern of self-gratification obviously creates as little stress on the woman as it does cultural enrichment. By adopting the expected role of non-aggression and lack of aspiration, a woman can originate enough superficial successes to keep her from insanity. Quickly the creative act solidifies into a cyclical repetition of sterility, banality and artistic defensiveness. As Simone de Beauvoir states, in relation to the aspiring (amateur) woman author:

Thus it is that the would-be writer, at the moment when she thinks she is the most original in presenting, without taking others into account, the image formed in her own mind, actually does no more than re-invent a banal cliché. The amateurish woman writer, instead of regarding words as interpersonal communication, a means of appealing to others, considers them to be the direct revelation of her own feelings; it seems to her that to choose, to erase, is to repudiate a part of herself; she does not want to sacrifice any of her words, at once because she is pleased with what she is and because she has no hope of becoming anything else.²⁵

This consciousness of artistic limitation is not a genetic shortcoming. Rather, it reflects the fact that society prohibits female attempts to value themselves and their creative worth. Women have never been asked, let alone allowed to have aspirations for themselves in the same manner as men. Their careers and creative energies have eternally revolved around home and family, and it takes a special kind of strength and determination for a

²⁵Ibid., pp. 664-665.

woman to be able to break that socially-inflicted mold--strength that few male artists are required to develop, simply in order to work to one's potential. Women still feel the conflict of roles that has traditionally said you can't be a mother and an artist, or even a wife and an artist, and do both well--a conflict that has condemned many women to lives lacking complete fulfillment. Men that teach, or who hold otherwise demanding jobs, are still permitted to be "professional" artists in their surplus time, while women who put in a 40 hour week tending a house and family are considered amateurs, even if their degree of commitment equals or exceeds that of any man. The West Beth Housing Project, in New York, for example, which was instigated to serve artists, does not permit a woman artist to utilize their child-care center because she does not go out to work. On the one hand, creative women are limited by their conditioning to be passive and dependent. They are dissuaded from a thoughtful involvement with anything but a family, as exemplified by the Sunday artist. On the other hand, when there is commitment and artistic integrity is great, women are told they must sacrifice their biological function, a price men strangely are never asked to pay.

Women continually tolerate the economic injustices that form the basis for Virginia Woolf's book, A Room of One's Own. "Intellectual freedom depends upon material things...and women have always been poor, not for two hundred years, merely, but from the beginning of time."²⁶ Because most women in art (and many men) find financial recognition slow, they are faced with the alternatives of either abandoning

²⁶ Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own, p. 180.

their work to the lack of materials or reinforcing their dependence on an economic source (such as a husband) which serves to complicate role conflicts and to intensify guilt. Gallery owners have been known to shun women artists for this very reason, saying that because a woman is frequently financially dependent, she has had to sacrifice little or nothing (?) for her art; therefore she lacks sufficient dedication. No such discrimination is leveled at the dependent male, however.

Economic support is only half the battle. A supportive climate is equally essential for success in such an ego-shattering field, and doubly so for the woman who must wage war with society as well as with herself. While it is true that many women artists have come from families with an artistic tradition, close relationships with male artists have often proved more damaging than helpful. A few women have been aided by such associations, like Berthe Morisot, who married Manet's brother, and Mary Cassatt, who maintained a close friendship with Degas. Sometimes this relationship is too strong, as is dramatically evident in the artistic style of the women, as with Kay Sage and Dorothea Tanning, Surrealists who married Yves Tanguy and Max Ernst, respectively, and Sonia Delaunay, who was strongly influenced by the Orphist works of her husband, Robert. In most cases, however, regardless of the woman's artistic intensity, the work of the wife is secondary to that of the husband. History will never record the creative lives of those women whose energies were dissipated through the demands of their husband's art. It is an unfortunate reality that in seeking support in their own efforts, the talents of many such women are submerged in the process of giving to their mate. The opposite of the creative husband

is a more manageable man who is unresponsive to his wife's creative needs. Such a man may also feel threatened or emasculated by her artistic successes and may attempt to stop her work through psychological sabotage. It is difficult and rare to receive both independence and support from a man without the accompanying trauma of role antagonisms. It is no wonder that many women, determined to be artists, renounce their own sexuality as well as the satisfaction of human relationships, because of the dissensions involved. Those women who have not the strength or determination to avoid such conflicts, often barter their creative existence for relative social and material stability.

The covert restraints that a woman experiences within herself in her quest for expression are reinforced by the discriminations that social institutions overtly inflict upon her. Miriam Schapiro, a feminist artist, describes her struggle to enter the art world:

I wanted to compete in the fullest sense but my training taught me to be friendly, docile, demure, quiet, not to interrupt, not to court displeasure--above all, not to be direct about my desire to be a painter...I began to learn the game. It was called Making It on the Art Scene. The players were men and women. The rules prescribed that the men were to make the decisions, pick shows, support each other, bring messages about money, sales and shows to each other. The women were to wait until tapped by the men. Certain moves were allowed the women independently; i.e. the women must give themselves as sex offerings and/or take care of the men, e.g. cook, clean, etc.--then, if everything went well, the women would receive artistic support and recognition, providing that they had comported themselves well in the other departments. This was a fun game.²⁷

²⁷ Everywoman, "Special Issue," May 7, 1971, p. 22.

The concept of the Art World Game, with all its sexual implications, is disregarded by many men and some women, too, who claim that art has no sex, and that good art will be recognized universally. For example, Helen Frankenthaler states: "Reforms have to be made by women themselves. That is, they should just go on being people and proceed from there to making paintings, and the question of sex will take care of itself."²⁸ Meanwhile, Lee Krasner exemplifies the more militant view in saying: "Any woman artist who says there is no discrimination against women in the art world should have her face slapped."²⁹ If, indeed, no discrimination exists, there is something very strange about the fact that while over 75% of the art school students are female, only 10% (some figures cite 5%) of the gallery population is women. While, granted, a certain percentage of women "drop out" of the art scene for various reasons (including many of the role conflicts discussed previously), the fact that the galleries and museums are exhibiting an increasing amount of women's work (and much of it is good work) indicates that women have been laboring underground, or behind the scenes, unrecognized and unnoticed until the explosion of the women's liberation movement destroyed some of the existing defenses and allowed them to be revealed. Museums have proven equally restrictive as far as women are concerned. 10% of the contemporary collection of the Metropolitan Museum is work by women, while the Museum of Modern Art can only claim 9%. In the

²⁸Cindy Nemser, "Forum: Women in Art," Arts Magazine, Fall, 1971, p. 18.

²⁹Ibid., . . .

last 43 years, this museum has held over 1,000 one-man shows, and they were literally for men, as only 5 shows were of female artists. The recent record of the Whitney Museum is better than most, due especially to the efforts of the Women Artists in Revolution (W.A.R.), an organization of women artists that grew out of the Art Workers Coalition in New York. This group made equal representation in the Whitney Annual its first objective, and through a series of political actions and "peaceful guerilla tactics," managed to increase the number of female participants in this show from the 1969 figure of 5% to 21% in 1971. W.A.R. has continued its exertions (the 1972 Whitney Annual had 24% women) to unite women artists and to raise the consciousness of the art community. It has instituted the Women's Interart Center, which includes exhibition space, workshop facilities, and regular forums for women. Other associations such as W.E.B. (West-East Bag), a group set up to inform women's art organizations of each others activities, and to provide data to women about jobs, exhibitions, research facilities, etc., furnish proof of the influence of contemporary feminist philosophy upon women artists. Having been stripped of confidence and disregarded for so long by the male art community, women have started turning to one another for support and encouragement. This past year there have been a number of conferences, both on the west and east coasts, geared at supplying women artists access to others with similar and varied experiences in this field. They have also served to make working women artists aware of organizations and activities for women in art.

This is not a unanimous sisterhood, by any matter of means, nor will it ever be. Women have

been too carefully conditioned to mistrust other females; it is not a lesson easily unlearned.

Those women who have achieved a certain amount of stature by the dominant male standards, sometimes seek to protect that accomplishment by negating the validity of the women's movement in art. To quote Irene Moss: "A woman who has achieved success in a man's world feels grossly superior and fears identifacation with weakness--other women."³⁰

There still remains a culturally-induced reluctance to identify with other women--to show with them, to work with them, from the apprehension that the common associative denominator will become women (i.e. second rate) and not art. However, more and more women's groups are forming, and more importantly, more individual women artists are obtaining requisite strength through the shared knowledge of others.

Lynda Benglis summed it up by declaring: "This is an exciting time to be a woman. There's much more communication between women now. It's important to think that you are a woman. My works relate very much to my sex, as they relate to formal problems."³¹

And from Jane Kaufmann, another current woman superstar: "The movement gave me permission to do what I want. I used to worry too much about my role as wife, rather than as artist. Many other women are breaking out for the same reason, and it's time. All the dominant images in painting have been male. I believe that's going to change."³²

³⁰Ibid., p. 18.

³¹D. Davis, "The Invisable Woman is Visable," Newsweek, November 15, 1971, p. 130.

³²ibid., p. 131.

One of the major concerns within the feminist art groups and within the art community as a whole has been the concept of "male" and "female" art. Muriel Castanis, in the March 19, 1970 issue of the Village Voice, directs her criticism toward the contemporary art scene, which she sees as completely male in content. The over-sized canvases, the massive sculptural forms, the strong use of minimal color, the gigantic earthworks are viewed as sexist statements by the male art world: a direct response to current feminist activism. She states:

The male attitude to women's views has a format which usually runs like this: first amused, then condescending or charitable (with much rationalization), and finally threatened. And when the threat is realized, anger. My contention is that art is at the threatened stage now, and what we are seeing in the 'big male art today' is the reaction to women's presence as serious artists.

While it is true that increasingly feminine work is being shown today, and while much of it is by women, some of it is not. We are too close to the present situation to make anything but the broadest of generalizations regarding the feminist influence on current art styles. It seems apparent, however, that many women are boldly using media and forms that they would have been embarrassed about in the past. It is equally true that this new feminine idiom is being taken seriously, at least in some quarters, and not relegated to the category of paint-by-number, as would previously have happened. If, indeed, we are experiencing a new vocabulary of sexual identity, it may provide a much-needed alternative for both men and women, in the area of personal expression. Perhaps we are on the verge of a new school of art, that of feminism. If so, the radical

feminists insist that such an art form can be created and perceived correctly only by women. This philosophy forms the core for the Feminist Art Program, set up by Judy Chicago and Miriam Shapiro at the California Institute of the Arts. It was organized to correct the masculinity of contemporary art which determined that a woman who decides she seriously wants to be an artist, must adopt a masculine identity and utilize a male vocabulary of forms before she can "make it". Chicago and Shapiro maintain that this borrowed male identity, while providing a woman with goals and enabling her to evaluate her work in terms of the prevailing power structure, is not at all an accurate reflection of the female character. Since women lack a cultural history of their own, and since art schools and the art community have traditionally overshadowed any strong female role models, Chicago and Shapiro determined that there was a demand for an art program for women, and only women, where the students could simultaneously grow both as women and as artists, with only women models to emulate. Says Miriam Shapiro of the program's beginning:

I began to understand the necessity for conducting classes exclusively with women. Women are afraid of openly expressing their true feelings as females around men. Because often when women try telling men the truth they are ridiculed and their femaleness is seen as a scar on their personality.³³

The students were selected personally by Judy Chicago who chose those who had established some sense of self. Says she:

³³ Everywoman, "Special Issue", p..3.

One of the things that a woman artist has to be in order to survive is very strong. She has to be strong all the time, because if you allow yourself to manifest weakness, then you will be seen as a woman. They (the students) had to deal with the idea of being aggressive, the idea of having goals, the idea of not being there for men, but for yourself, and your own goals; living a life that's your own, and not just an extension of a man's.³⁴

After the initial consciousness-raising, the students have continued their ventures as artists, a part of which involved the cooperative transformation of an old Los Angeles mansion into "Womanhouse," a museum conceived as an homage to all those women who have utilized their creative energies in the home instead of in the outer world. Its exhibits employ a female vocabulary to create art not possible by men, and basically not perceptible by men. This visual display is in direct correlation with the concurrent work of the students, i.e. the documentation of female art in terms of the experiences and emotions that are uniquely woman's. The concept of female iconography--the common body of imagery in female art--is in the process of being historically authenticated by these women students. They are recording congruent elements within the work of women in the hopes of establishing a visual heritage for females that reaffirms their sexuality. They maintain that much of the creative work by women reveals typically feminine sensibilities such as vulnerability, delicacy and gentleness. These characteristics often take shape in reflections of children and childlikeness, play, animals, flowers, egg-forms and central core imagery.

³⁴Ibid., p. 34.

The concept of female iconography may be a valid one, for certainly our culture has made varied experiences and situations accessible to men and women (a female Van Gogh would never have been allowed the freedom to travel to coal mines, for instance). However, underlying the differences of sex are certain fundamental human values that all artists share. Perhaps we will never accurately be able to define what is male and what is female in our society until we have a truly human situation (not "human" as interpreted by men). It is true that much of our culture has been shaped by male attitudes (in art, religion, the sciences, etc.) but if women are actually seeking the humanization of society, adopting the masculine tactics of segregation and reverse sexism will only form more social tensions, instead of providing the unification of men and women on an equal basis.. There is another intrinsic element of danger in the Feminist Art Program. Any time a defense is built into a philosophy such as "non-perception of women's work by men," the possibility of pre-excused incompetance exists. This is not to say that sexual prejudices don't prevail; however it could conceivably become a handy defense for women, and subsequently do more damage to their artistic growth than would the original cultural oppressions.

An additional question should be raised concerning the sexual identity of art. If one takes for granted the premise that art assumes the emotional characteristics of its maker, to arbitrarily categorize art as being male or female, is to reject the more creative possibility, i.e. that every truly original artist has both masculine and feminine qualities which could be proportionately reflected in his work. Who can say, for example, that the

delicate work of Fragonard or Renoir could not, or should not, be produced by a man? While most art is at least partially determined by the character and experiences of its maker, other factors are involved. The development of forms, or systems, that artists incorporate mirror the analytic quality found, to some extent, in every individual. To insist upon purely female or purely male art is to ignore a large part of both men and women. To quote Louise Nevelson: "Emotion and intellect are integrated. Human beings are heir to all emotions. The basic work of creation is emotional and reflects the depth of humanity."³⁵ The "depth of humanity," as defined by both men and women equally, is what the current movement to free women artists is all about.

We have traveled great distances since 1885, for example, when the ladies of Thomas Eakin's life drawing class at the Pennsylvania Academy, forbidden to draw from a nude model, worked instead from a cow. A great distance, and yet, there are still so many barriers to sexual freedom and human understanding. For women, the burden of cultural repression is beginning to lift, both within themselves and externally from the institutions we must cope with in our daily existence. But there is so far to go. There are so many hidden quotas to dissolve, so many attitudes to alter. The art community cannot expect change until society as a whole is altered, and those alterations will be a long time in coming. Things are still very oppressive for those artists who have not had the good fortune of being born a white, middle-class male. Doors have been opened to a few women, but only just a crack. Dorothea

³⁵Elizabeth C. Baker, "Sexual Art-Politics," Art News, January 1971, p. 41.

Rockburne says: "You can get to the starting gate, you can get past it if you're really good, but you sure as hell can't get much further."³⁶ Getting further is what women want now, and what they will hopefully achieve. Once the traditional occupational and psychological conflicts have been overcome, women will at last be in a position to surface with their fight. What must be avoided, however, is a fight that destroys more than it creates. Every attempt at social reform experiences both radical and reactionary factions. The radical feminists, however, stand to lose a great deal more than they would gain if the movement aimed at alleviating oppression for women ends up being the oppressor. Men-hating women risk self-destruction in the effort to rid the world of masculine prejudices. The struggle to free women must not create a new race of "men," with its own set of discriminatory attitudes. Rather, we must strive for the independence of equality, within our creative endeavors, and simultaneously throughout the world.

³⁶D. Davis, "The Invisable Woman is VISIBLE,"
p. 130.

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Ode to Oblivion--8'x 5'



Ode to Oblivion--Detail



Ode to Oblivion



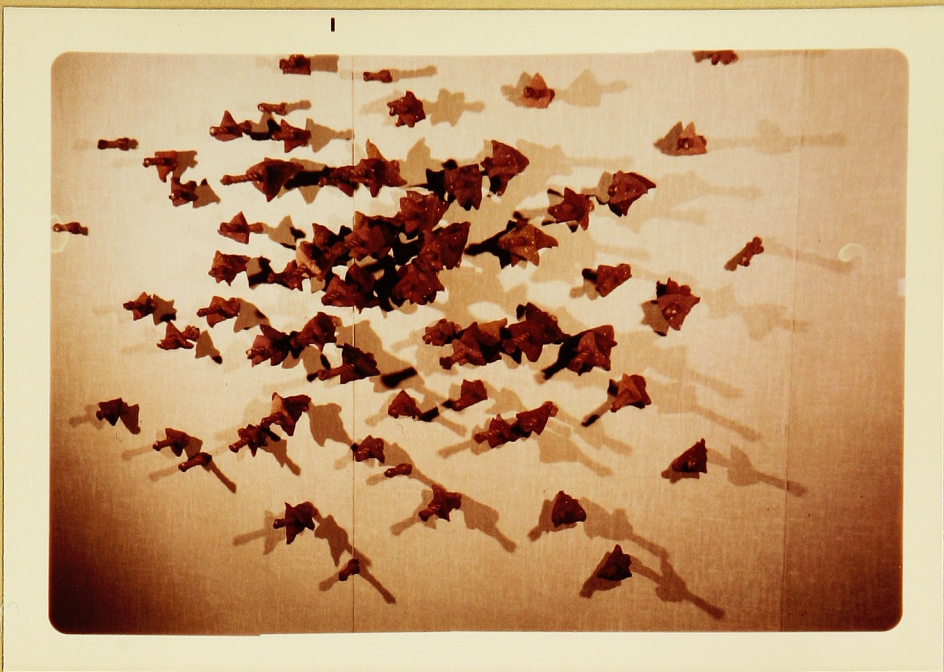
Abacus I--6'x 6'x 8'



Abacus I--Detail



Abacus I--Detail



To a Housewife--5'x 8'



To a Housewife--Detail



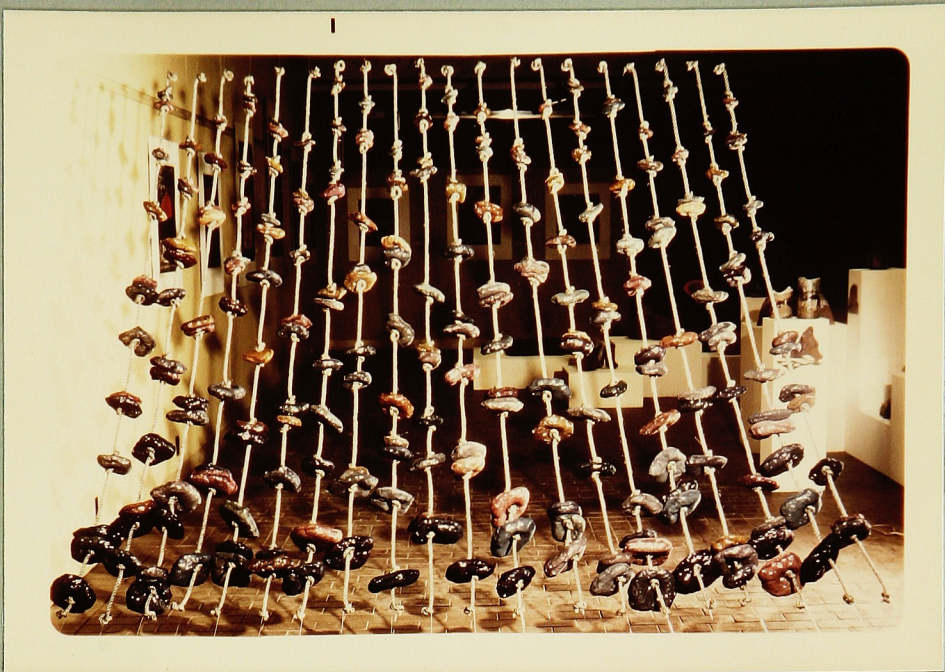
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Cornerscape--Detail



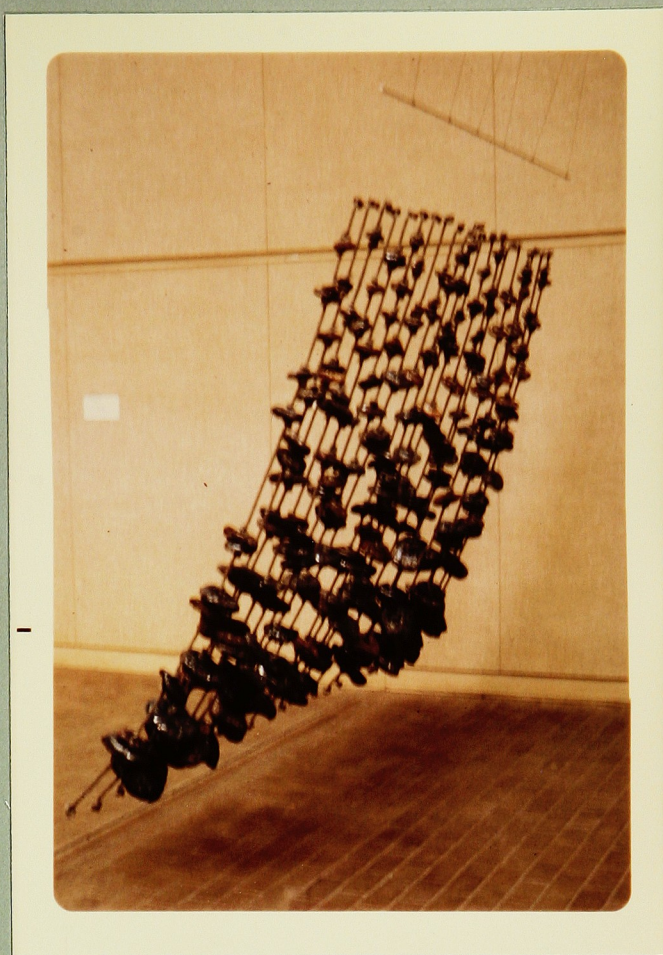
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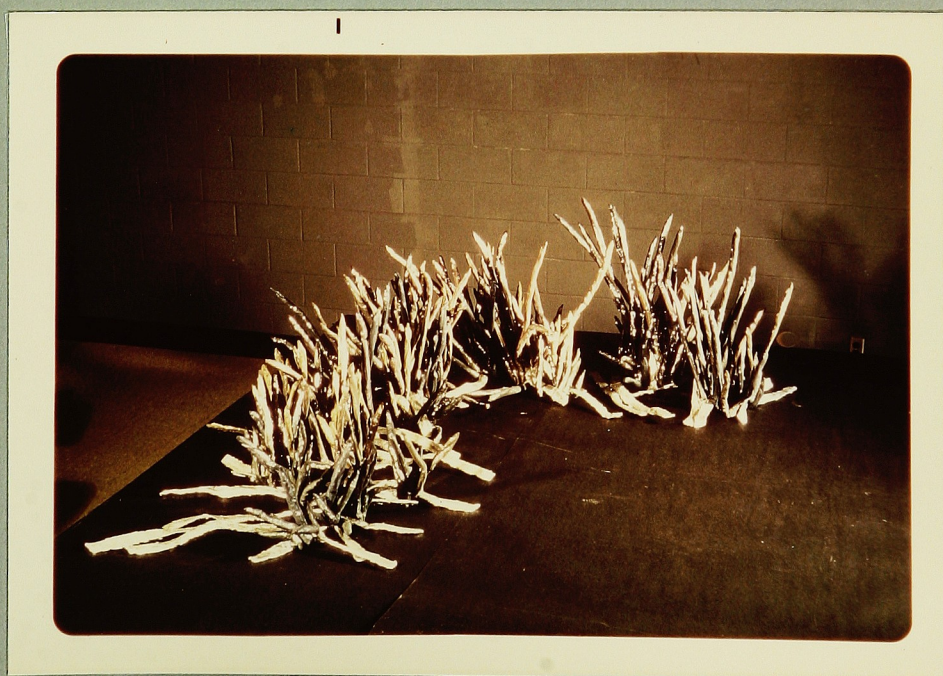
Abacus II--10'x 10'



Abacus II--Detail



Abacus II



Floor Bush--6'x 6'



Floor Bush



Floor Bush--Detail



Sticks and Stones--3'x 6'



Sticks and Stones--Detail



Sticks and Stones